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WEATHER-LORE.

IN 1846 M. A. Denham published "A Collection of Proverbs and Popular Sayings relating to the Seasons, the Weather, etc. : printed for the Percy Society." R. Inwards, in 1869, produced a similar compilation, called "Weather Lore." (London : W. Tweedie.) In 1873 C. Swainson made a "Handbook of Weather Folk-Lore." (Edinburgh and London : W. Blackwood & Sons.) This excellent little treatise includes, beside English proverbs, a large number of weather sayings from the French, German, Italian, and other languages. Beside these special compilations, most British collections of folk-lore contain a chapter including popular saws relating to the weather.

In the United States, General Hazen, the chief signal officer of the War Department, thought it worth while to cause to be made a collection of the "popular weather proverbs and prognostics used throughout the country, and by all classes and races of people, including Indians, negroes, and all foreigners." With this view was issued a "Circular calling for reports of popular weather sayings," classified under the following heads: proverbs relating to (1) the sun, (2) the moon, (3) stars and meteors, (4) rainbows, (5) mist and fog, (6) dew, (7) clouds, (8) frost, (9) snow, (10) rain, (11) thunder and lightning, (12) winds, (13) prognostics from the actions of animals, (14) from birds, (15) fish, (16) reptiles, (17) insects, (18) trees, plants, etc., (19) prognostics of the weather drawn from various objects (this head included a great variety of portents, such as those derived from chairs, tables cracked before rain, coals, candles, lamps, smoke, corns, rheumatism, etc., etc.), (20) proverbs relating to days of the week, (21) months of the year, (22) seasons of the year, (23) the year, (24) all proverbs of weather and popular sayings not included under the above heads.

The material so obtained was included in a volume of 148 pages, prepared by Lieutenant H. H. C. Dunwoody, and printed at the government printing office, Washington, in 1883. The localities in which the proverbs were current were not indicated, while at the same time a mass of British sayings, and of translations of sayings current in European languages were added, thus rendering it impossible to distinguish how much in the collection was really American: so that the volume, as it stands, is not useful as a manual of American weather-lore.

It need not be pointed out that it is desirable to have a good collection of weather sayings really in use in the United States. The quaint rhymes or proverbs formerly employed by farmers or mariners,

relative to seasons and occupations, times of sowing and reaping, domestic life or navigation, would no doubt be a valuable addition to English lore, to which the bulk of this material belongs. It would also be interesting to observe what additions or changes were occasioned by the climate of a new country.

Weather proverbs may be distinguished, with respect to their origin, into those which are the results of observation, and those which are the expression of superstition.

It is from the first point of view that they have been of interest to meteorologists. In the language of the prefatory note of Lieutenant Dunwoody, "many of these sayings express, in a crude form, the meteorological conditions likely to follow, and have resulted from the close observation on the part of those whose interests compelled them to be on the alert, in the study of all signs which might enable them to determine approaching weather changes." A similar view is expressed by R. Abercromby and W. Marriott, in a paper on "Popular Weather Prognostics," read before the Meteorological Society, London, December 20, 1882, and printed in the Quarterly Journal of the Society. After noticing the attempts of the ancients to predict the weather, they observe: "In later times our forefathers studied the weather, and as they had no instruments to guide them, they observed natural objects and noticed the appearances of the sky and clouds, and also the movements of animals, birds, plants, etc. Shepherds and sailors especially being exposed to all kinds of weather, would naturally be on the lookout for any signs of a coming change, and after a time would begin to associate certain appearances with certain kinds of weather. A good deal of weather wisdom of the above character has been thrown into proverbs, trite sayings, and popular verse; and we propose in the present paper to examine and explain some of these by the aid of the most recent discoveries of meteorological science." Accordingly, the authors point out, under the heads of "cyclone prognostics," "wedge-shaped isobar prognostics," "straight isobar prognostics," and "anticyclone prognostics," the meteorological conditions which justify certain sayings, such as those relative to a halo round the moon, a red sunset, etc.

It must be said, however, that the part of weather proverbs which have this character of veracity is very small in proportion to the whole. Moreover, even of those which partake of the nature of observation, a considerable number are common to many countries, and have been borrowed by English people in common with other beliefs; that is, they represent, not independent observation, but the tendency to follow tradition even in matters which most vitally concern mankind, and where observation is most possible. The tact which is acquired by mariners, for example, through long experience,

and which is not yet rendered useless, and probably will always be relied on in emergencies, is essentially of a character incomunicable by word of mouth ; and thus the legendary lore even of these skilled persons has little relation to the facts of the case. The old saws which are of the nature of a generalization from experience are chiefly confined to obvious phenomena, common to a great part of the world, and therefore capable of being handed down through many generations, and passing from one country to another. The value of the study of weather-lore is therefore rather anthropological than meteorological ; it illustrates in what manner the stock of ancient sayings has been supplied, and how limited is the direct influence of experience on oral tradition.

American weather-lore is chiefly derived from English lore, which again is only a part of the common stock of western and central Europe. A discussion of some of these proverbs would require elaborate articles, and involve inquiry into the calendar and religious festivals of ancient nations, both European and Asiatic. Some of these sayings may receive investigation hereafter ; but for the present, we confine ourselves to printing a few examples of American proverbs, some of which are matched by corresponding English saws, while others are not exactly paralleled in British collections.

On the Continent of Europe, a great number of proverbs indicate the weather which may be expected on different days of the ecclesiastical calendar, or draw presages from the atmospheric phenomena of such days. In British weather-lore, the greater part of these festivals are no longer used in reckoning ; yet the days of St. Valentine, St. Matthew, St. Barnaby, St. Swithin, and others are still remembered. In America, the only ecclesiastical day (beside Christmas) which we have found mentioned in weather sayings is Candlemas, respecting which the following rhymes are current :—

If Candlemas day is fair and bright,
Winter will take another flight :
If Candlemas day bring storm and rain,
Winter is gone and will not come again.

(Massachusetts.)

Variation in line 3 : clouds and rain.

If Candlemas day is cold and clear,
The king had better be dead and on his bier.

It is rather curious that this bit of royalty should be preserved in Massachusetts. An English rhyme is given by Inwards :—

The hind had as lief see his wife on the bier,
As that Candlemas day should be pleasant and clear.

Another version (American ?) is cited by Dunwoody :—

I would rather see my wife on a bier,
Than to see Candlemas clear.

The superstition respecting the effect of fine weather at Candlemas (the feast of the purification of Mary), as tending to prolong the winter, extends to a great part of Europe, and is referred to in other sayings, English and American. To discuss its origin would lead us beyond the limits of this paper. A Latin rhyme is quoted by Sir Thomas Browne, in his "Vulgar Errors":—

Si Sol splendescat Maria purificante,
Major erit glacies post festum quam fuit ante.

The twelve days at Christmas time make the almanac for the year. (New Jersey.)

It is quite a general idea that twelve days, beginning at Christmastide, or on the first of January, indicate the weather for the year. We should be glad to obtain additional information respecting American variants of this superstition.

When the sun crosses the line, wherever the wind is for the next twenty-four hours, it will be most of the time for six months to come. (New Hampshire.)

Dunwoody (p. 89) gives a saying to the effect that as clears off the line, or equinoctial storm, so will all storms clear for six months; and another that the wind and weather for three months follow the wind and weather of the equinox.

The last three days of a month govern the next month. (Baldwinsville, N. Y.)

The first three days of a season rule the weather of that season. (American? Dunwoody, p. 100.)

The first seven days of a month govern the corresponding days for the whole month, all but one which will be the opposite. (Baldwinsville, N. Y.)

If the first Sunday in the month is rainy, every Sunday but one of that month will be rainy; if it is pleasant, it governs the Sundays in the same manner. (Baldwinsville, N. Y.; Massachusetts.)

The same thing is said of Monday, called "Washing-day." If it rains the first washing-day of the month it will rain in all. (Boston, Mass.)

It is a little curious that "washing-day" (*laugar-dagr*) in old Norse was a name of Saturday as in modern Yankee of Monday. But both designations arise from a similar usage. The feast of Sunday was preceded by purifications or ablutions which caused the northern title of the seventh day; and the raiment cast aside on that day, in order that Sunday might be honored with proper apparel, is, in New England, ready for the weekly washing of the Monday to which it has thus given a name.

The general principle underlying the various superstitions which

have been enumerated is, that the character of any period of time, whether year, season, month, or week, is indicated by the weather observed either at the beginning of the same period, or end of the preceding; that is, speaking metaphorically, by the tokens belonging to the conception, or the birth, of the time in question.

We proceed to notice some sayings relative to days of the week. Friday inherits its character from two opposite sources, and has both pagan and Christian associations, which give it a reputation for bringing good or ill fortune. But whether lucky or unlucky, it is individual. It has its separate weather, says a Westphalian adage quoted by Swainson. It is averse to resembling Saturday; or perhaps the aversion is mutual. Hence a change may be expected after this day.

If the sun sets clear Friday night, it will rain before Monday.
(Salem, Mass.)

The weather on Friday is regarded, in Europe, as prophetic of Sunday. (Swainson, p. 171.)

Saturday also is a peculiar day. As named after Saturn, it ought to be under the influence of that most cold and distant of the planets, and possess something of the character indicated by the adjective Saturnine.

“Jupiter atque Venus boni, Saturnus-que malignus” is an old adage. But in the mediæval church, Saturday was regarded as belonging to the Virgin. On this day, the Council of Clermont, 1096, required all priests and monks to repeat an office in her honor. It is no doubt from this relation to Mary that the day is supposed to be especially bright. “No Saturday without sun, no girl without love” is a Spanish saying quoted by Swainson. French and German rhymes are similar. We find the same idea set forth in sayings current in New England.

There never was a Saturday on which the sun did n’t shine some part of the day.

The sun shines some part of every Saturday in the year but one.
(Boston, Mass.)

It is certainly remarkable to find the worship of Mary preserved among descendants of the Puritans in the form of a weather superstition.

Finally, we mention the manner in which it is supposed that the number of snowstorms in winter may be predicted.

There will be as many snowstorms during the winter as the day of the month on which the first storm occurs. (Cambridge, Mass.)

There will be as many snowstorms during the winter as there are days remaining in the month after the time of the first snow. (Dunwoody, p. 74)

If it storms on the first Thursday, or any subsequent one, of a month, count the remaining days of the month, add to this the number of days remaining of the moon, and they will give the number of storms of the season. (Dunwoody, p. 100.)

This increasing complication is characteristic of the methods of the science of augury, which meets failure in prediction, not by abandonment of the principle, but by devising more intricate applications of the rule.

The sayings which have been recorded, belonging only to one of the branches of weather-lore, are far from indicating the compass of the subject, but may answer to invite further information.

The writers wish to acknowledge the assistance of Miss Ellen Beauchamp, Baldwinsville, N. Y., who contributes a large number of signs and superstitions current in that locality; of Mrs. Anita Newcomb McGee, Washington, D. C., who sends similar information respecting the beliefs of Washington; and of Miss Julia D. Whiting, Holyoke, Mass. The information thus obtained will hereafter find place in this series of papers.

*Fanny D. Bergen.
W. W. Newell.*